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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 NIAMEY 000096

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SUBJECT: Niger: Opposition Members Provide Update

Ref: a) Niamey 0048, b) Niamey 0029, c) Niamey 0025, d) 09 Niamey 1005

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¶11. (SBU) Summary: During an office call on Charge, representatives of the Coordination of Forces for Democracy and the Republic (CFDR), Niger's main opposition group, provided an advanced copy of a memorandum outlining the opposition's response to the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) mediator's suggestions for a way out of Niger's political crisis. The CFDR said that it would be willing to allow President Tandja to stay as a figure-head for a nine-month transitional period. CFDR members added that it hoped an international observers' body, comprised by the European Union, African Union, ECOWAS, United States, and the United Nations could be established to ensure a peaceful transition. End summary.

¶12. (SBU) On February 3, a delegation made up of Bazoum Mohamed, the Vice President of the opposition Nigerien Party for Democracy and Socialism (PNDS); Abdou Labo, Vice President of the Social Democratic Convention (CDS); Soumaila Bagna, representative of the General Confederation Free Trade Unions (CGSL); and Mahamane Hamissou, leader of the Coalition of Niger's Civil Society (CSCN) met with Charge at the Chancery. The Charge, accompanied by PolOff and Pol Specialist, received the delegation led by Bazoum Mohamed, who had met several times in recent months with Embassy personnel (reftels). The Charge and Mohamed discussed the MPPR-CFDA talks scheduled to re-commence on February 4; the views of the ECOWAS Mediator, Gen. (retired) Abdousamali Abubakar; the anticipated post-mediation agenda; and ways out of the current political impasse.

Current Mediator Proposal is Vague

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¶13. (SBU) Bazoum expressed dissatisfaction with the content of the Mediator's road map. On January 14, ECOWAS Mediator Abubakar presented his suggestions for a way out of the political crisis for Niger (ref A). According to Bazoum, the propositions by the Mediator lack clarity and are vague, leaving substantial room for differences in interpretation. For example, the mediator's proposal did not indicate the proposed duration for the transition, nor did it determine the bodies that would lead the transition. Furthermore, it did not clarify on which basis and how the current National Assembly would remain and be extended to provide for the opposition's representation and it did not mention the drafting and adoption by consensus of a new constitution.

President Tandja Can Remain for Nine Months

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**¶4.** (SBU) The opposition stated that it could agree to President Tandja's remaining in power as a figure-head for a nine-month transitional period. In this capacity, he would no longer have exceptional executive powers to rule by decree. (Note: The latter point differs from the opposition's proposal of December when it stated that it would be willing to concede that President Tandja be permitted remain in power for up to six months during a transitional period. End note.) When pressed for his rationale behind this time frame, Bazoum argued that this nine-month window would provide sufficient time to organize elections; this period is similar to a past transitional period, he said, citing the political situation that occurred in 1997. Abdou Labo added that a new constitution could easily be drafted based on the 1999 constitution, which was the result of a consultative process, and even some aspects of the 2009 constitution. He noted that Niger has extensive experience in updating voter lists as well as revising the Electoral Code, organizing the Independent National Electoral Commission (CENI), and managing the electoral process as a whole, and therefore this would not take too much time.

#### Conditions for Transitional Period

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**¶5.** (SBU) Bazoum stated that the GON must annul the results of the August 4 referendum, as well as the October 20 legislative elections and December 27 municipal elections. He added that any actions taken by President Tandja since his assumption of emergency powers and under the 6th Republic must be annulled. Following that, transition bodies should be installed with President Tandja remaining in office as a figure-head leader; a Prime Minister (who also would serve as head of government and head of the armed forces); a Cabinet made up of equal numbers between the president's supporters and the CFDR; a National Transition Council made up of 50 members (25 from the presidential camp and 25 from the CFDR) acting as legislative body;

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a State Council acting as a Constitutional Court; and a National Communication Observatory acting as the High Council of Communication (CSC). The specific prerogatives of the transition bodies will be defined by consensus.

#### New Constitution

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**¶6.** (SBU) Aside from the transition bodies, a "Commission of Fundamental Texts" would be set up by consensus to draft a new constitution, electoral code, and other pertinent statutes. He added that at the end of the transition period, there would be elections, but that no members of any transition bodies would be allowed to run as candidates in the presidential elections.

President Tandja meets with President Wade of Senegal

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**¶7.** (SBU) Bazoum stated that leaders of Niger's main opposition group, the Coordination of Forces for Democracy and the Republic (CFDR) had travelled to Senegal to meet with President Wade and asked if he could help solve the political situation in Niger. On his way back from the African Union summit in Addis Ababa, President Wade made a brief stop-over in Niamey, perhaps to gauge President Tandja's receptiveness to this concept. In remarks offered for media at the airport, however, President Tandja, speaking in Hausa, promptly rejected the notion that any outsider other than the ECOWAS mediator would be permitted to involve himself in Niger's domestic issues. Opposition members argued that President Tandja's statements were meant for public consumption and that he wanted to demonstrate his authority and resolute position to Nigeriens.

#### High Hopes for Mediation Talks

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**¶8.** (SBU) Comment: Although the meeting provided hope that the opposition actively is trying to generate a range of political accommodations to allow Niger to move beyond the current crisis, there is no indication that the GON will do the same. The opposition members acknowledged so much, stating that their true hope is that the Mediator writes a thorough and accurate report for the upcoming ECOWAS Heads of States summit scheduled for February 16, which will follow the mediation, and that his report will

recognize that the opposition had made substantial efforts to compromise and deliver Niger from its political impasse. End comment.

WHITAKER